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ABSTRACT

A university teacher of English as a second language in Japan describes his rationale, methods, and materials for teaching language through literature. Literature was chosen for its intellectual sophistication and ability to motivate adult learners. The use of recorded readings and/or video or filmed versions of texts is recommended as a means of saving time, and a number of readings and films are suggested as appropriate. All are brief enough to be used in an instructional period of 90-110 minutes. The film version is preferred over the recorded reading because it is more easily understood, allows for the teaching of the piece as an integrated whole, and saves class time that can be used for its criticism. A sample syllabus is included, with some discussion of the reasons for selecting and sequencing the works for instruction in Japan. (MSE)

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# HOW TO TEACH LITERATURE IN EFL/ESL CLASSES*

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The present paper is twofold, as suggested by the title. It is concerned, on the one hand, with the teaching of language and, on the other, with the teaching of literature, emphasis being put on the latter. This is how I am teaching English and American literature in Japan, especially in the university.

Although I introduced two years ago how English is being taught in Japan in 'English Education and Cultural Background in Japan', the synopsis of which is printed in the *IATEFL Newsletter* (No 92 August 1986), the traditional method of English teaching in Japan is translation into Japanese. This method is easy and looks fruitful to the Japanese, because by this method everybody in the classroom thinks and speaks in Japanese, their mother tongue and, for that reason, no student looks evidently inferior. In addition, by this method they can use texts more difficult than the communication ability of the foreign language students are learning. This method is convenient and useful, when knowledge unknown to that country is taught and was much employed in the Era of Restoration and Modernization of Japan. Devoting too much to teaching knowledge, however, translation was so emphasized, it has become no less than the end itself. In consequence, foreign languages have been scarcely acquired by the Japanese, at least for the communicative purpose.

The communicative method was introduced to supplement, and even substitute, the translation method. It was once in fashion. Yet it has come to be discovered before long that this method also has many defects. One of them which is fatal is that even by this method learners cannot be better at speaking, while they can have far less knowledge of the language they are learning, still less knowledge of the content of texts, because those texts used for communicative purpose are generally much easier, compared with those for translation, in order to enourage the students to speak out. The common assessment made in Japan today of the communicative method is that by this method learners waste time, energy and money. What is worse, students often

find themselves dissatisfied with the teachers hired specially for this purpose, generally native speakers.

It is to compensate those fatal deficiencies in both Translation Method and Communicative Method that I choose literature for texts of language teaching. Literary works of art are intellectually sophisticated enough to keep the interest of adult learners always as keen in the texts as, at least, texts for Specific Purposes. This is proved by the tendency of those students who, after having finished English for Specific Purposes, still find themselves interested in learning English through literary texts, just as many people will in their mother tongue, when they have made some progress in education.

Once it has been proved that the intellectual level can be maintained by employing literature as texts, our next problem is how to teach literature. For that purpose I recommend to adopt the recorded reading or, better still, the video or filmed version, of literary masterpieces. It is because, in this way, literary works of art can be taught more easily within the limited period of time. I am not necessarily insisting on quantity rather than quality as a prerequisite for teaching literature. It must be remembered, however, that, in EFL/ESL classes, quantity is always another problem to be solved on account of the language barrier.

The use of the recorded reading will save much time wasted by Translation Method. Listening to the reading, the students may be introduced to a whole story, or a portion of a novel, whether well understood or not. It is as if to swallow the food a little too big for the mouth. What will make a great difference is whether the food is swallowed or not and not really whether it will be well digested or not. Digestion is, of course, important, but it is secondary for the moment. Another merit of this method is that, by listening to the reading, students will become familiar with the recommendable speed of English naturally read or spoken as well as the good intonation, pronunciation, accents, etc. In addition to the improvement of the aural

ability in that way, the oral ability will also be trained, if questions and answers are given in the target language. The method will then come very close to Communicative Method, while conducted on a highly intellectual level. It is one of the ideal methods of teaching a foreign language as well as literature, particularly in universities. The following are the examples of the recorded reading I recommend. (They are alphabetically ordered by the authors.)

(1) Erskine Caldwell, 'The Strawberry Season'

(2) Erskine Caldwell, 'The Visitor'

(3) Wilkie Collins, 'The Dream Woman'

(4) Thomas Hardy, 'An Imaginative Woman'

(5) Ernest Hemingway, 'Indian Camp'

(6) Virginia Woolf, 'The Legacy'

(7) William Wordsworth, 'Lucy Gray; or, Solitude'

Those literary works of art mentioned above are all short enough to be suitable for a period of 90-110 minutes on the university campus, yet they are problematic in some way, or even enigmatic, so that a heated discussion may be invited by the students about them, as good texts should. I demonstrated in what ways they are problematic, and how useful they are for texts, in 'Language Teaching Through Literature' (1986) and 'What Should Be Taught Above the Intermediate Level' (1987).

So satisfactory as the use of the recorded reading may be, especially when combined with questions and answers in the target language, better still is the adoption of the filmed version. It is because, by this method, neither the translation nor the explanation is required for the comprehension of the content often found necessary in other ways. In most cases, a film can be understood, when shown, if not perfectly, but better than by any other method. The degree of this understanding is

amazing, even though a film is shown in a foreign language. Not infrequently I am impressed by the power of this audio-visual effect, independent of such devices of subtitle, caption system, etc., which I am asserting in the present paper with special emphasis that I should like to introduce into language teaching/learning more fully. It is incomparable so far.

Another advantage of the filmed version is that a literary work of art can thus be taught as an integrity, as is a piece of literature. It is taken for granted that it is best, for any piece of literature, to be presented as a whole as it is, neither divided into parts, nor rewritten or adapted, though it cannot be helped on some occasions but be presented in one of those unrecommendable ways. Among them the adaptation, particularly in reading, is not welcome. It is because the original can be read in the complete and unabridged way, however long it may be. It is in this respect that the recorded reading must be differentiated from a film in which it is impossible to give the original, as it is. And this is also the reason why the filmed version is more welcome than the recorded reading in the adaptation, even when the latter is much nearer the original.

What is advantageous, in addition, for the presentation of literary works of art in film is that, by using the saved time for the translation, the explanation, etc. otherwise necessary for understanding the content, criticism of the works shown in film can be taught, whether it is of original works or of the filmed version. Extracts of the criticism of works, possibly both accepted and opposing, may be handed out, every time a film has been shown, so that the students may not only learn how the work has come to be received but also deepen their understanding of the work in the way it would be impossible except when stimulated by diverse opinions. A greater effect will be made, if those extracts are handed out one after another, paying close attention to how the students respond to them. In my own experience, the criticism of

original works seems to be more welcome. It is perhaps because criticism, too, is better of original works than of the filmed version.

With as much amount of knowledge and experience as mentioned above, the following syllabus is made for the 'History of English Literature in Film'. It is for an EFL/ESL class, of which I am taking charge.

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| April-May: | Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* |
| May-June: | William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* |
| June-July: | William Wordsworth, *Shorter Poems* |
| September-October: | Jane Austin: *Pride and Prejudice* |
| October-November: | Charles Dickens, *The Great Expectations* |
| November-December: | Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* |
| December-January: | E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* |

(The reason why the syllabus begins in April is that in Japan academic year begins in April.) I hope the above syllabus will satisfy those scholars specializing and/or interested in teaching the 'History of English Literature', though alternatives may, of course, be admitted.

A fairly radical alternative to my syllabus is that more works will be introduced and less extracts of criticism handed out. The students will, then, have the knowledge of wider variety of the works in, more naïve and spontaneous reaction to, and more familiarity with, English literature. The reason why I made the above syllabus is that, by limiting the number of the works to be shown, more time will be spent on the criticism of the works and, thus, a deeper knowledge of the cultural background in which they were produced will be given. Then, not only the knowledge of the individual works and authors but even of the relationship among them will also be learnt. It must be better, more coherent and equipoised. With the aid of the filmed

version, nevertheless, it is difficult to teach the *Canterbury Tales* in a month, even in the modern English version, especially in EFL/ESL classes. It is inevitable to select some tales to concentrate on. With Shakespeare, too, the question will be raised as to why no other work, but *Romeo and Juliet*, should be taught. If one play should be chosen of Shakespeare's *oeuvres*, many scholars and critics would insist on choosing *King Lear*. But I wonder if it is rather too complicated for EFL/ESL classes, if taught without much explanation, however popular the drama may be.

As regards the prose works in the syllabus, it is not necessary to begin with Jane Austin after the example of F. R. Leavis in *The Great Tradition* (1960). There are many other ways of teaching the great tradition of the English Novel. The *Pride and Prejudice* may, therefore, be replaced by *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe which is considered to be a work by the father of the English Novel and a text useable also for the study of economics, as pointed out by Ian Watt in *The Rise of the English Novel* (1967). But the more serious problem now will be how to avoid the possible misunderstanding which will be caused by teaching more prose works than drama and poetry, as though they were representative of English Literature. This is particularly misleading to the Japanese students, because in Japanese literature prose is dominant as well as representative. The assimilation will be easily and readily done. In spite of such a danger, more than half of the works in my syllabus are prose works. It is because the Japanese students are most at home with them. And, as they are most interested in modern and contemporary works, so I include in the syllabus as many as three from the recent prose works. The reason why I choose E. M. Forster rather than D. H. Lawrence is that the former is being as much talked about also in Japan, partly because of the recent publication of the Collected Works by Edward Arnold and partly because of the homosexual theme in *Maurice*. The latter seems to have excited the public also with the recent release of the film under the same title. Another reason for my choice of Forster is that the Japanese seem to hesitate to accept the

kind of love between Connie and Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, whereas homosexual love is either accepted or rejected. Many Japanese still think that homosexual love is abnormal and should not be accepted, while the other believe that it is one of the traditional forms of love unable to be repudiated, whatever response may be made to it.

In teaching literature, no matter how you may teach it, problems cultural as well as cross-cultural cannot be avoided, as already evident from the above discussion in the present paper, especially in EFL/ESL classes, though they may provide good subjects for discussion. Yet I dealt with this theme in 'What Should Be Taught Above the Intermediate Level', the paper read in the 8th World Congress of Applied Linguistics sponsored by the AILA and held in the University of Sydney in the summer of 1987. It is for this reason that I do not go into any discussion of the theme here.

Osaka, Japan. (1988)